United Nations A/67/634

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 December 2012

Original: English

Sixty-seventh session
Agenda item 20 (a)
Sustainable development: implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Initial input of the Secretary-General to the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, resulted in an agreement by Member States to launch a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals that can be used to pursue focused and coherent action on sustainable development. In the Conference outcome document the Heads of State or Government and high-level representatives resolved to "establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly" (see resolution 66/288, annex, para. 248). The outcome document mandated the creation of an intergovernmental open working group that would submit a report to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action.

2. Among the inputs to the ongoing consultations on sustainable development goals are the June 2012 report of the United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, "Realizing the Future We Want for All" and the report of the High-level Panel of the Secretary-General on Global Sustainability (A/66/700). Broad consultations on sustainable development goals are expected to continue.

3. The current report was prepared in line with paragraph 248 of the Conference outcome document and taking into account the above-mentioned efforts. It offers a synthesis of the input received to a questionnaire sent to Member States and is presented as an input to the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

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A. Moving towards sustainable development goals

4. The sustainable development goals are intended to advance sustainable development as a further integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The aim is to guide and contribute to transformative change as stipulated in the Rio+20 outcome document, in support of rights-based, equitable and inclusive processes that enhance sustainability at global, regional, national and local levels.

5. Sustainable development represents a natural next step in the evolution of the development agenda, supported by the United Nations. From the 1960s through the 1990s, national actions and international cooperation were defined as part of the "Development Decades." A number of goals, for health, education and other "social" dimensions of development, were set during that period, culminating in the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. It has long been understood that the economic and social dimensions are clearly interrelated; for example, at a macro level economic growth is considered necessary for achieving objectives in education and health, while improving education and health status contributes to economic growth in the long term through multiple channels. These mutual, synergistic interlinkages have, however, not been as prominently recognized with respect to mainstreaming the environment in the course of setting international goals and targets.

6. This recognition of the close interrelationship among the three dimensions of sustainable development is especially appropriate at a time when significant climate change impacts are becoming apparent and humankind is increasingly aware of the urgent need to respect finite and fragile natural resources. This calls for a closer understanding of synergies and trade-offs among the three sustainable development dimensions at subnational, national, regional and global levels and underscores a need for more coherent policymaking.

B. Vision for the sustainable development goals

7. The outcome document contains indications of what the sustainable development goals, inter alia, could seek to achieve. Foremost among these is poverty eradication, for which sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth in developing countries is a requirement (see A/RES/66/288, annex, para. 106). In addition, reducing inequalities, promoting gender equality and ensuring equal access to quality education are examples of additional outcomes to which the sustainable development goals can contribute.

8. The outcome document also indicated that the process to develop the sustainable development goals needs to be coordinated and coherent with the processes to consider the post-2015 development agenda (para. 249).

9. Coherence between the process of formulating sustainable development goals and the processes for defining the post-2015 development agenda could be fostered by taking into account key documents addressing the post-2015 process, such as the report of the United Nations System Task Team, "Realizing the Future We Want for All". This report emphasizes the following defining elements:

- Core values of human rights, equality and sustainability
- An agenda based on concrete end goals and targets, one of the key strengths of the Millennium Development Goal framework — potentially differentiated along four dimensions of a more holistic approach: (1) inclusive social development; (2) inclusive economic development; (3) environmental sustainability; and (4) peace and security — which builds upon the three pillars of sustainable development
- "Development enablers" that help guide policy coherence at all levels[1]
- Recognizing that one size does not fit all, thus leaving space for national policy design and adaptation to local settings
- Conceiving the agenda as truly global, with shared responsibilities for all countries, implying also a redefinition of the global partnership for development.

10. Overall, the sustainable development goals should seek to envision a more holistic and integrated agenda for advancing human well-being that is equitable across individuals, populations and generations; and that achieves universal human development while respecting the Earth's ecosystems and critical life support systems. Strengthening the interface between science and policy can contribute to defining one set of appropriate goals, targets and indicators of the post-2015 development agenda.

II. Synthesis of questionnaire responses

11. The synthesis presented here is based on 63 Member State responses, including European Union members that submitted a joint response as the European Union. This is a partial sample of views of Member States, representing roughly one third of the United Nations membership.

A. Sustainable development goal priority areas

12. In preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, an indicative list of priority areas to be addressed through the sustainable development goals was submitted by three Member States within a concept paper; the issues were considered to be politically mature and to address widely acknowledged needs. The responses to the questionnaire have reflected and built upon this initial thinking. In addition, one country proposed a set of criteria and related questions that could be useful in identifying priorities.

13. An analysis of responses reveals that the overarching priority areas of poverty eradication and sustainable management of natural resources are high on the list of many respondents, with more specific issues elaborated by many that could be included under these broader headings. For example, the dependence of the poorest

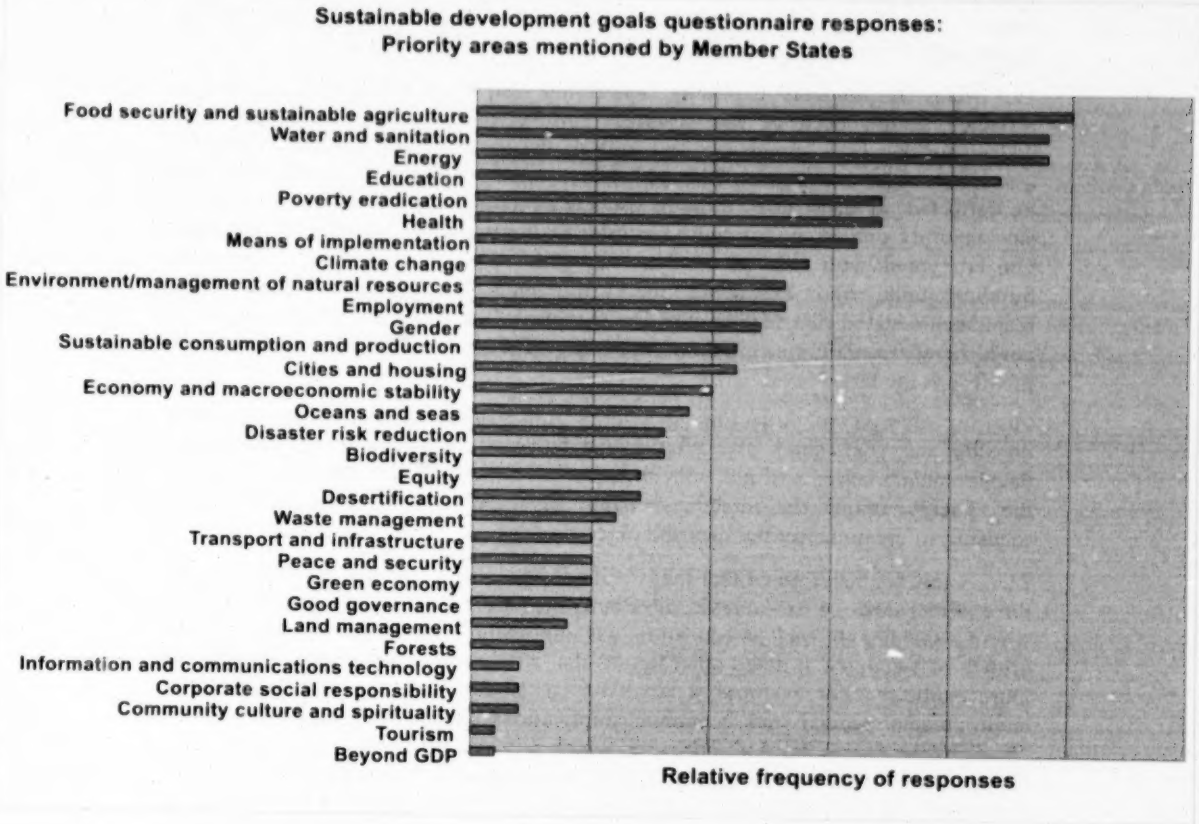
[1] As defined in "Realizing the Future We Want for All", "enablers" would include such development elements as a fair and stable global trading system, adequate financing for development, affordable access to technology and knowledge and good governance practices based on rule of law, among others.

in poor countries on natural resources for their livelihoods, enhanced capacity of natural systems to support human welfare, ecosystem conservation and restoration, sustainable ecosystem management, and the reduction of ecosystem pollution were all mentioned by different respondents, and could fall under sustainable management of natural resources as a priority area. In outlining a number of priority areas, one respondent emphasized the understanding that the sustainable development goal process would converge with the post-2015 development agenda, resulting in the formulation of one set of post-2015 development goals. Another respondent added that identifying priority areas would be facilitated if countries established a common understanding of the relationship between the post-2015 framework, the sustainable development goals and the Millennium Development Goals.

14. Some priority areas were frequently listed as clusters of interlinked issues. Ensuring equal opportunity in accessing basic needs such as energy, water and food, and in accessing education and health services, as well as improving the quality of these services, comprised one cluster. Some respondents linked aspects of sustainable agriculture, food security, nutrition, water, combating desertification and land degradation, sustainable energy and energy security in various combinations. One respondent grouped priority areas within three clusters according to their economic, social and environmental aspects; others suggested that the sustainable development goals could encompass the multidimensional nature of well-being by looking beyond gross domestic product (GDP) measures with respect to quality of life.

15. One respondent stated that priority areas should be considered alongside the continued implementation of the existing Millennium Development Goal categories, depending on where achievement of implementation stands, and linkages should be strengthened between evolving sustainable development goals and the existing Millennium Development Goals. One submission favoured adding to the "unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals" the issue of disaster reduction and resilience.

16. The following figure displays priority areas roughly in order of their frequency in responses.



17. It is noteworthy that the key social issues addressed by the Millennium Development Goals are very high on the list, suggesting an intent to keep the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of the agenda. At the same time, the prominence of climate change, sustainable management of natural resources, and sustainable consumption and production, as well as of economic issues like employment and macroeconomic stability, suggests an interest in having a more effective integration and balancing of the three dimensions of sustainable development going forward.

B. Balancing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development

18. There are a number of ways in which the sustainable development goals might strive to balance the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. To some extent, the right approach will depend on how the process evolves, and in particular how the Millennium Development Goals are incorporated. One respondent advised that economic, social and environmental issues should heretofore be identified as "dimensions", rather than "pillars", of sustainable development, in order to avoid the erroneous impression that these elements are

somehow separate, and to emphasize that delivering on any of these three fronts requires addressing the interlinkages among them. In this regard, one response highlighted the importance of climate change adaptation for food security.

19. Many respondents explicitly stated that all three dimensions should be reflected within each of the sustainable development goals, with each goal addressing the three dimensions and each of the dimensions having a comparable associated target or indicator. One submission stated that the three dimensions could be reflected in each goal through associated targets and possibly by making sustainability one of the guiding principles of the post-2015 development agenda. Others agreed with this in combination with various other options involving building upon and expanding the Millennium Development Goals. Some respondents stated that Millennium Development Goals that are not met by 2015 could be appropriately adapted and updated to the sustainable development goals, possibly at the target level.

20. In addition to reflecting the three dimensions within each sustainable development goal, some also emphasized balance across the set of sustainable development goals as a whole, with attention to horizontal issues that could increase the synergy among the three sustainable development dimensions, rather than focusing solely on sector policies and objectives.

21. A few countries noted that there will not be a single formula for balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development. One country gave an example of where a social goal, such as education, has implications for the long-term economic growth of a country. It noted other targets that will incorporate all three dimensions more explicitly. For example, a target on sustainable fisheries will clearly have environmental, social and economic implications. Many respondents cited the "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative, which includes different targets in all three dimensions: a target on access to energy (social and development dimension); a sustainable energy production target (environmental dimension); and an efficiency target (economic dimension); and that it could also take into consideration interlinkages such as those between energy and health, and energy and gender. Another country noted that a similar approach could be envisaged for a water goal or a goal on food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture.

22. One respondent observed that, while the Millennium Development Goals have succeeded in catalysing support for meeting the world's most basic social development objectives, it has also been widely recognized that there is a need for a more integrated approach moving forward. Many respondents agreed that the Millennium Development Goals should be integrated into a larger sustainable development framework beyond 2015, with some also noting that both integrating the Millennium Development Goals and balancing the three dimensions within and across each goal would be ideal, since these two options are inherently interlinked. One respondent favoured balancing the three dimensions and expanding the Millennium Development Goals while incorporating aspects of community, culture, human rights and spirituality. Another emphasized aspects of governance, noting that, in order to fulfil the promise of poverty eradication, the post-2015 framework would need to recognize the conditions for open economies and societies: the rule of law, the absence of conflict and corruption, the presence of property rights and strong institutions.

23. One country proposed integrating and expanding Millennium Development Goals with specific objectives in environmental protection and sustainable use of natural resources that would include access to drinking water, sanitation and energy; food security and sustainable agriculture; and biodiversity protection, ecosystems restoration and resource efficiency. Another noted that it is important to strike the right balance between comprehensiveness and specificity in order to avoid overloading or over-broadening the post-2015 development agenda and thereby undermining the specificity that has been a useful and important aspect of the Millennium Development Goals.

24. Several respondents favoured one set of goals, while one country specifically outlined some of the pitfalls of having two sets of goals, such as creating duplications, spreading the limited resources of developing countries too thin and creating confusion in reporting.

25. Suggesting integration of the Millennium Development Goals into the sustainable development goals was considered by one respondent to be premature prior to drawing lessons from the implementation of Millennium Development Goals and determining gaps in sustainable development indicators, while another noted that a thorough review of the Millennium Development Goals, as foreseen in the 2013 review, would reveal gaps in achievements.

26. One country affirmed the feasibility of carrying Millennium Development Goals over into a new set of goals, possibly with some modifications perhaps to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. For example, Goal 1, on hunger, could be integrated into an enlarged and comprehensive goal on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. Similar approaches could be envisaged with health (Goals 4, 5 and 6), and follow-up on Goal 2 (education) could address the relevance of education with regard to the different dimensions, taking into account the special relevance of the social dimension in the education field. Further goals should be based on ongoing international initiatives such as "Education for All" and "Education First".

27. Several respondents supported expanding Goal 7, along with building on the Millennium Development Goals, but others opposed this option. One said that choosing this option would amount to a missed opportunity of historic proportions to truly incentivize and promote the integration of the three sustainable development dimensions. One country stated that, in order to promote environmental sustainability, special emphasis should be accorded to the environmental pillar, as it has a direct impact on economic and social development. Another said that expanding the existing Goal 7 on environmental sustainability is not sufficient to ensure that a future set of sustainable development goals balances the three dimensions of sustainable development.

C. Key use of sustainable development goals at the country level

28. A question on how sustainable development goals would be used at the country level presented respondents with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with implementing the Millennium Development Goals while conjecturing how the sustainable development goals might be applied nationally. The following table provides the number of times specific uses were mentioned by respondents.

Table
Key use of sustainable development goals at the country level

1. Balancing sustainable development dimensions	(22 responses)
2. Guiding development cooperation	(19 responses)
3. Defining national policies	(17 responses)
4. Addressing key pressure leading to unsustainability	(14 responses)
5. Influencing national budget allocations	(11 responses)
6. Reviewing impact of national policies	(10 responses)
7. Other	(3 responses)

29. Many respondents indicated that sustainable development goals would be useful in striking a better balance among the three dimensions of sustainable development. Several respondents commented that with strong political commitment at the global level, which could be measured by frequency of meetings held at the highest political level, among other indicators, the sustainable development goals could have a very important influence on the process of defining national policies and, most importantly, on national budget allocations, which are critical for the successful implementation of the goals.

30. One country noted that sustainable development goals could help to create additional impetus and awareness on sustainable development priorities that can further galvanize the public to action. Another country noted that they should play an important role in encouraging support for government efforts by promoting, for example, public-private cooperation. In addition, they would be useful to some countries for measuring impacts, with goals and indicators ensuring that intended beneficiaries of a particular policy are reached and that development becomes more sustainable.

D. Defining national targets for global, universally applicable goals

31. A couple of countries stated that universally applicable sustainable development goals should contain globally accepted values using an inclusive, human-centred approach in order to ensure applicability for all countries.

32. Nearly all respondents agreed that the targets associated with the sustainable development goals should be common but differentiated, depending on country characteristics and level of development, recalling the Rio Principles.

33. In considering how sustainable development goals can be made practically relevant for each country, most respondents agreed that the particular national circumstances, capacities, priorities and level of development of each country must be carefully taken into account, with particular reference made to small island developing States, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries. In addition, targets would need to be framed to ensure that environmental, social and economic objectives are duly reflected. One respondent stated that the possibility of setting sustainable development goals applicable to a group of countries with similar characteristics and circumstances (for example, according to their gross national income) could also be explored.

34. It was noted that differentiation of universally applicable goals could be achieved at the target or indicator level. In order to be more practically relevant for all stakeholders, each country could be allowed to define the subgoals and target values for itself, and adjust the sustainable development goals to its level of development and internal characteristics, as long as this does not undermine the global values.

35. Examples given by different countries include:

- Countries with limited landmass might assign higher priority to energy efficiency than to generation of renewable energy. For developed countries participating in the "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative, the access target is less important than targets on energy efficiency and sustainable energy production. For a developing country, access to energy remains important and could be supported by developed countries in the context of development cooperation.

- A goal on food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture would have dimensions that are relevant at the domestic and the international levels; for example, reduction of food waste and post-harvest loss. Some of the targets would be relevant for all countries, like sustainable land and water management. Some targets would be relevant for many countries, but with different means. Reducing food loss and waste, for example, would in some countries require better storage and transport facilities, while a different set of policies would be required in other countries.

- In addressing cities, provision of services and basic infrastructure might be key for developing countries, while addressing urban sprawl might be a priority for developed countries.

- Fighting HIV could mean reducing the rate of prevalence by 10 per cent for a least developed country where the rate is among the highest, while the target could be 50 per cent for developed countries with a much lower prevalence rate.

36. A couple of countries suggested that, once the global targets have been set, countries should make an assessment and set their own, more specific targets and indicators to reflect the enormous range of differences among and even within countries. In this context, another country noted that each country should, in addition to reporting on the aggregate national statistics, monitor and report on the implementation of the goals at the level of subnational regions, since in most countries there are great differences in levels of development and overall capacities between regions.

37. One country suggested that a dashboard of indicators could be defined internationally, and each country could decide which, if any, of those indicators would be useful for its internal policy and decision-making processes. Each country could, moreover, adjust them as it sees fit, an important option that would allow for different baselines of development. Another respondent noted that universally applicable sustainable development goals must be accompanied by indicators and tools that are broad enough to accommodate practical situations in each of the countries, while still providing comparable results. Still another country mentioned that the design of the sustainable development goals should incorporate opportunities for cooperation among countries.

38. Specifically, different Member States proposed that sustainable development goals and their associated targets could be:

- Made relevant through the formulation and application of national sustainable development strategies or their equivalents, and application through interministerial management schemes and other cooperation mechanisms
- Translated into national actions and indicators with review and measurement; these activities and their monitoring and evaluation (metrics, indicators) would need to be in line with and supportive of the national agenda
- Formulated so that cross-cutting issues are incorporated into the structure, with specific targets on equity; Governments may decide to develop suites of indicators to guide national processes that focus on addressing prevailing inequalities or internal differences, or that reflect ethnic considerations that are relevant to specific indigenous communities
- Tailored to the unique needs of certain groupings of countries, in particular fragile or post-conflict States, with expert groups and international organizations setting benchmarks for targets; also addressing the unique vulnerabilities associated with country groupings within the United Nations system (for example, small island developing States)
- Focused, in the case of least developed countries, on meeting basic needs such as ensuring food security, energy, housing, health, drinking water, sanitation and primary education for all, while keeping the environment sustainable and ensuring social and gender equity.

39. Several respondents highlighted how the Millennium Development Goals outlined global ambitions to be met collectively by the international community, and reiterated the need for scientific backing and analysis of the experience of the Millennium Development Goals in the sustainable development goal development process. One noted that targets need not necessarily be country-specific, suggesting that it might be possible to develop a range of targets at varying levels for a given sustainable development goal and invite countries to choose from this "menu" accordingly. Another country emphasized that sustainable development goals can be relevant only if they integrate the Millennium Development Goals, which will not be achieved by all by 2015, and if development assistance is made available. A few countries noted that, while the priority areas and goals covered by the sustainable development goals should be universal and global in nature, universal objectives and targets applicable to all countries would not be possible to agree upon.

40. One suggested that targets or indicators relating to economic and environmental dimensions should be differentiated, with developed countries assuming the larger responsibility of meeting them, while developing countries might assume a larger responsibility of meeting social targets such as poverty eradication and food security. It was also argued that the policies and targets for natural resource management in less developed countries should not include parameters and indicators dictated by developed countries but rather be locally derived.

41. Several responses stressed the responsibility of developed countries to implement their commitments, noting that countries having achieved the sustainable development goals could assist others to meet the goals, and highlighting the need for additional, predictable and appropriate funding; technology transfer and

capacity-building; and multilateral partnerships. One country observed that, while the bulk of financing must come from the countries in which sustainable development policies are implemented, the experience of the Millennium Development Goals points to a global expense for which current official development assistance (ODA) is not sufficient. Another country suggested that minimizing bureaucracy and streamlining processes for greater access to finance, technology and knowledge to assist least developed and developing countries would help them to achieve their respective goals and targets.

42. Several responses proposed that the sustainable development goals should be guided by the principles of mutual accountability, respect for national ownership and shared responsibilities. One country observed that all countries could benefit from engaging multilaterally and sharing information to facilitate better understanding of national circumstances and priorities, and in turn helping to identify financial, technical and capacity-building support needs and opportunities for collaboration. Establishing a multilateral partnership around each sustainable development goal for voluntary collaboration and information sharing may be helpful in this regard.

43. Several respondents advocated redefining categories of development levels within the United Nations system and revisiting criteria on how countries are assigned to categories, suggesting a new system that measures more than GDP as discussed at the Conference in Rio de Janeiro. One noted that timelines could be flexible. Another noted that World Bank statistics and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index would be useful for measuring progress.

E. Incorporating existing goals and targets

44. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development states that the sustainable development goals should build upon and be guided by Agenda 21, the Rio Principles, and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development ("Johannesburg Plan of Implementation"). Many responses supported the incorporation of all existing commitments from these agreements as well as the Millennium Development Goals, updating as necessary to reflect progress made. Several countries noted that the sustainable development goals should be consistent with other internationally agreed goals and targets, but the process should not be used to renegotiate agreed goals and targets. A few countries mentioned that reference points could be taken from Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, especially with regard to sustainable consumption and production, waste management and the management of natural resources, and from the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

45. One country argued that the sustainable development goals should address the gaps in existing goals and targets that have hindered the implementation of sustainable development and the integration of its principles to date, and in this regard, compilations of internationally agreed goals and their progress were referenced as useful tools (for example, GEO-5). One country said that the question

of incorporating existing goals into the sustainable development goals pre-judges discussions within the Open Working Group and the High-level Panel.

46. Several countries stated that the ongoing pursuit of the existing unmet Millennium Development Goals should continue to be addressed, and it may be useful to consider reframing goals that have gone unrealized. One respondent emphasized that sustainable development goals are not new versions of Millennium Development Goals, others indicated that Millennium Development Goals should be carried over to the sustainable development goals, and another highlighted the special event on the review of the Millennium Development Goals to be held during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, noting the opportunity for reflection on the role of Millennium Development Goals in the sustainable development goals. A few countries indicated that the sustainable development goals should be more comprehensive, encompassing aspects of sustainable development not covered by existing goals, although one cautioned that politically sensitive issues subject to ongoing discussion should not be incorporated.

47. One country observed that much has changed over the past 15 years. An array of crises, from finance to the increase in natural disasters, as well as opportunities stemming from increased access to technology and information, signal the need to formulate a new suite of goals and targets that build upon past efforts but are relevant to the world today. Expert guidance from agencies, universities, think tanks and other entities that are familiar with this work should inform the formulation of the new development agenda.

48. In identifying existing goals and targets, many responses reiterated the priority areas they had identified in response to question one, including those on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, ensuring environmental sustainability, living in harmony with nature, developing a global partnership for development, social equity, good governance, water, energy, sanitation, sustainable use of oceans and seas, mountains, forests, drylands, chemicals, climate change, sustainable cities, transportation, tourism, waste, industry, health and education.

49. Some countries highlighted other initiatives or agreements to consider, including:

(a) Five Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security;

(b) Zero Hunger Challenge;

(c) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(d) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

(e) New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States of the Busan Declaration;

(f) Education for All Initiative;

(g) Millennium Declaration;

(h) Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries;

(i) Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries;

(j) Mauritius Strategy;

(k) Sustainable Energy for All Initiative;

(l) Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development;

(m) Doha Development Round of trade negotiations.

F. Ensuring coherence with the post-2015 development agenda

50. Several countries stated that the development of sustainable development goals should be linked with the evolution of the post-2015 development agenda, to ensure that the two processes inform each other. Regular and timely feedback between sustainable development goals and the post-2015 process are required as both processes evolve. Many countries agreed that the High-level Panel of the Secretary-General, the Millennium Development Goals review, and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals must coordinate their efforts. Some countries suggested that progress on the development of the sustainable development goals should be presented and discussed at the special event on the review of the Millennium Development Goals during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly and the first session of the high-level political forum. One country emphasized that the sustainable development goals should be defined, validated and adopted in a participative manner by all countries before 2015. Another noted that steps to ensure coherence and integration are already under way, as demonstrated by the work of the United Nations Task Team to provide the support requested in the outcome document of the Conference.

51. Several countries emphasized the importance of reaching a consensus that there will be a single development agenda with a single set of goals; this can be achieved only if the post-2015 process is structured accordingly and fully incorporates sustainable development principles. One country noted that the Millennium Development Goals review needs to inform the sustainable development goal process and integration of the two processes should be achieved. Another country observed that the leadership of the Secretary-General and the role of the Secretariat are critical in this regard.

52. Some countries noted that regional bodies, such as the regional economic commissions, should play a leading role in ensuring that outputs from the regional level are uploaded into global processes and vice versa. Regional processes and discussions are highly important, given that this level is closer to the specificities of countries or groups of countries than global discussions.

53. Consultative processes should be undertaken at local, national, subregional, and regional levels that are wide ranging and inclusive of all stakeholders to ensure ownership and effective and timely implementation of eventual goals. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network also has a role to play in ensuring integration and coherence of the processes.

54. Other responses highlighted specific steps, including:

(a) Ensure that capitals are appropriately and actively represented in international discussions;

(b) Ensure coordination, coherence and synergy among United Nations system institutions;

(c) Reform the international framework for sustainable development, in particular the United Nations bodies dealing with sustainable development issues, as well as relevant implementation bodies such as UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and update United Nations development agenda priorities in line with the sustainable development goals;

(d) Create an institutional structure for the implementation and monitoring of the goals that would be integrated into the overall sustainable development institutional framework of the United Nations system, rather than creating a parallel structure;

(e) Set midterm targets for each of the United Nations system entities, including the Bretton Woods institutions and international financial institutions, and develop an effective monitoring process to ensure that targets are being met.

G. Assessing progress

55. A couple of countries suggested that global level assessments should allow for aggregate measures of progress, as well as more detailed assessments by regions, country groups and others. This will influence the way in which data is collected and analysed, while enriching the picture that the assessments provide. Others stressed that assessments at the country level should address challenges in national sustainable development strategy planning, utilize existing indicators and develop specific timetables. Several suggested that a system for monitoring and accountability and a well-functioning set of indicators would need to be created, without imposing an undue reporting burden, and preferably begun during the sustainable development goal development process.

56. Other suggestions from different respondents include:

- The process must be both bottom-up and top-down
- Different baselines and timelines, rather than absolute numbers, should be taken into account
- Disaggregated data will be needed to capture inequalities in progress across different groups and/or regions. This will require building up statistical capacities in countries to enable them to generate such data.

57. A couple of countries observed that the actual assessment will depend on how the sustainable development goals are ultimately structured, and how "differentiation" will be translated into practice. It was noted by others that targets and indicators have to be established while taking into account the different characteristics, resources availability and development level of each country. One country suggested that the sustainable development goals could include indicators that are based on a conceptual indicator framework, drawing on experiences in monitoring sustainable development including the work done by the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development.

58. One country proposed that overall assessment of progress might be undertaken by drawing upon and synthesizing elements from a variety of reports and data sets, from both national sources and international institutions. Another country proposed the creation of an online system to which countries would upload data from the

national level, and which could transform data into easily understandable development trends that could become the basis for annual reports.

59. One country stressed that the mandate to follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments was given to the high-level political forum at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and that the Forum should be mandated to ensure that progress in sustainable development goals is monitored and assessed at regular frequencies. Suggestions from other countries included regular and periodical progress reports at the national, regional and global levels to be submitted to the Forum; that a report of the Secretary-General assessing progress towards sustainable development goal achievement be produced annually for the General Assembly; and that publication of a report on global sustainability development, as mandated by the Conference outcome document, be carried out at least every three years. One country stated that independent assessments should be made based on countries' periodic progress reports as a tool for verification and sharing good practices. Another stressed that existing methods such as submission of national reports and assessments at the regional and subregional levels should be considered by both the General Assembly and the Forum.

60. One respondent suggested that regional meetings of national representatives in charge of monitoring the implementation of sustainable development goals should be organized as part of the process of preparing global reports; another proposed the establishment of an independent United Nations body or commission to monitor and evaluate global progress. One country also stated that the monitoring of progress should allow interaction and dialogue among countries, possibly through the high-level political forum, the Economic and Social Council or high-level events and dialogues, attracting visibility to the scope of the sustainable development goals.

61. One respondent proposed that countries should establish or assign institutional bodies that will be responsible for monitoring and reporting. In this regard, several countries noted the importance of capacity-building for countries to measure progress, and a number said that synergies with other programmes or initiatives, like Beyond GDP, should be explored.

62. One country stated that participatory, multi-stakeholder, public-private partnership building and networking will be the key to design, implement, monitor and assess the progress on sustainable development goals, stressing that each country should develop the involvement of and ownership by all relevant stakeholders. Others emphasized that civil society organizations at all levels should be engaged to monitor and report on these goals, as they can provide the oversight for full accountability and transparency.

H. Engaging all stakeholders

63. The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, in paragraph 248, outlines an inclusive and participatory process for elaborating the sustainable development goals through the Open Working Group that is open to all stakeholders. There is strong agreement among the respondents that civil society, academia and other relevant stakeholders should be fully engaged in the process of developing the sustainable development goals, and involved at all levels of consultations in national, subregional, regional and international

discussions on sustainable development goals. At the global level, some countries advocated active engagement of Major Groups as defined by Agenda 21 in all steps of the sustainable development goal development process and in the Open Working Group itself, and proposed establishing a forum or mechanism dedicated to Major Groups to share their ideas, collaborate with Member States and ensure accountability. One country proposed that the Major Groups could also participate as observers in the Open Working Group; another stated that the Open Working Group would need to provide Major Groups regular updates on progress. One country stressed that the necessary measures should be taken to secure funds for ensuring participation of representatives from least developed countries.

64. Some encouraged progress on various modalities that the United Nations is already undertaking or planning to undertake that will incorporate the participation of civil society, academia and relevant stakeholders, including the establishment of expert panels mandated by the Conference outcome document that shall include broad participation by national experts, including representatives from all sectors of civil society; and mechanisms for extensive social engagement using modern information technologies. It was stated in this regard that the Open Working Group should be informed by research-based evidence and expert analysis to the maximum extent possible.

65. Several countries advocated consultations with and entertainment of proposals from Member States not represented in the Open Working Group. In elaborating its sustainable development goal proposal, one country said the Open Working Group should discuss inputs prepared by a competent Secretariat with support from the United Nations system for greatest efficiency, and referenced the structure developed for the reformed Committee on World Food Security as a useful model to emulate.

66. Civil society should also be invited to indicate ways it could contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development goals. One country stated that the capacity of civil society to participate in public policy shaping should be strengthened by providing an enabling environment at the country level, including interrelated legal, fiscal, institutional, informational, political and cultural conditions.

67. A number of countries indicated that regional and national-level consultation processes should be characterized by transparency, broad coverage and equity, so that recommendations of all actors are reflected and transmitted from the bottom up. Specialized workshops, meetings and briefings at the local, regional, national and global levels dedicated to gathering views from specific sectors should be organized. Some stated that Member States should engage civil society and other stakeholders at the national level with the support of national focal points for sustainable development to ensure a broad-based consultative process for national proposals and the formulation of national sustainable development strategies.

68. The participation of the private sector — a complex and diverse sector — will require dedication and focus; its engagement is critical, but the avenues for participation are not yet clear. In this regard, engaging the United Nations Global Compact was suggested. It was also noted that corporate sustainability is one of the most important ways that business can make a contribution. Women should continue to be empowered to take greater part in the development agenda and the process of developing the sustainable development goals. The potential role of the media in

building public perception on the sustainable development goals was also highlighted, as was the need for regular public information activities.

I. Sustainable development goal principles

69. Most respondents supported the principles recommended by the United Nations Task Team in its report to underpin the development of the sustainable development goals. The Rio Principles were cited as the most relevant guiding principles, particularly the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and the principles contained in the Millennium Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation were also mentioned. Principles of universality, transparency, comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, as mandated by the Conference outcome document, were recalled, as was the right to development. One country stressed that the principles and characteristics agreed on in the outcome document should be the basis for the work, which could be complemented with the principles recommended by the Task Team in its report, if they gain wide support.

70. Some responses elaborated on the principles recommended by the report of the Task Team, as follows:

(a) Specific goals or objectives mentioned under the principle of ensuring sustainability included: efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, calculating the economic value of natural resources and ecosystems, promoting the green economy, reassessing the understanding of "prosperity", increasing resilience, stimulating knowledge-based growth and development, promoting sustainable use of energy, promoting development of new and environmentally friendly technology, reducing the burden of adaptation to climate change, environmental protection, preserving and enhancing forests;

(b) Specific goals or objectives mentioned under the principle of reducing inequalities included: poverty alleviation, ethical and equitable growth and development, promoting equity between and among countries, social cohesion and solidarity, human security, reducing unemployment, empowering disadvantaged groups, protecting vulnerable social groups, developing human capital, promoting gender equality, building more inclusive societies, fostering opportunities of trade and not aid, addressing volatility in commodity prices and markets, preventing external debt crises and ensuring fairness;

(c) Specific goals or objectives mentioned under the principle of promoting human rights included: inclusive and people-centred growth, protecting human life, peace and security, protecting dignity, respecting cultural diversity, good governance, rule of law, transparency, democracy, promotion of fundamental liberties, freedom, social justice, empowerment of women and youth, gender equality, the right to development and the right to food.

J. New Global Partnership for Development

71. In responding to how a new Global Partnership for Development should be constructed within or around the sustainable development goals, one country stated that the implementation of the sustainable development goals will be more complex than that for the Millennium Development Goals. The sustainable development goals

will encompass structural and systemic changes, articulate linkages, and involve difficult decisions around trade-offs. The sustainable development goals are truly about a global partnership that involves actors that to date have operated largely in isolation within their respective sustainable development dimensions: economic (for example, the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization), social (for example, the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization), and environmental (for example, UNEP and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission); therefore, this new partnership will also need to be closely aligned with efforts to achieve greater global coherence. Another country noted that a harmonized institutional framework, including transparent communication and synergy of actions between different United Nations institutions and agencies, is crucial in this regard.

72. Some countries observed that the new cooperation framework, or Global Partnership for Development, should be effectively linked with the evolving institutional arrangements and outcomes of processes agreed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, including the new financing strategy for sustainable development, a strengthened UNEP, and review and monitoring by the high-level forum on sustainable development. A few noted that the Global Partnership for Development could build on existing resources and arrangements, such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Compendium of Commitments of the Conference. A few also stressed that it should also be based on the Busan Principles for Effective Development Cooperation, including the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. One country suggested that the new Global Partnership for Development should be built on the basis of national sustainable development strategies through the creation of a national sustainable development strategy network. Another stressed the need for the promotion of public-private partnerships and the introduction of innovative economic instruments in favour of the green economy. The Global Compact with its 10 principles could be used as a model for partnerships that could be created for the implementation of sustainable development goals.

73. One country suggested that the new Global Partnership for Development should assume the responsibility for guiding and supporting the implementation of the sustainable development goals, as well as putting in place mechanisms for accountability and transparency at global and national levels. A new Partnership would need to put in place mechanisms, such as financing mechanisms and the channelling of development finance, that deliver on sustainable development goals at multiple levels. This would involve working alongside or supporting development models and approaches being used by specific countries. The contours of sustainable development goal development and implementation should not follow a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Many countries stated that the establishment of groupings with common characteristics and vulnerabilities could be considered, such as least developed countries, middle income countries, small island developing States and countries emerging from conflict.

74. Several countries argued that the new Global Partnership for Development should be constructed around previous commitments made under various international conventions, summits and conferences, and contribute to the strengthening of sustainable development. It was suggested by different countries that the Partnership should serve to facilitate mobilization of resources; mobilize partnerships at different levels; ensure information and experience sharing; and

clearly define responsibilities and roles of different actors. One country suggested that the new Partnership should be built around a unified financial mechanism. A couple of respondents stated that it should also go beyond ODA and focus on developing mechanisms to enable easier, more accessible and more efficient and effective transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies needed for sustainable development. Some countries stressed the involvement of the private sector and civil society, while one respondent stressed that new forms of cooperation and mobilization of new partners (for example, emerging economies, private sector, donor countries, private donors and NGOs) are necessary in order to move beyond the traditional donor-recipient model.

75. Finally, one country asserted that the Global Partnership for Development must address key areas for global collective action, including management of migration, global health and global environmental challenges, access to knowledge, development and transfer of technologies, and easing of trade barriers. Another emphasized the importance of creating an enabling environment and achieving policy coherence for sustainable development.

III. Conclusions

76. This section highlights a few of the more important messages that emerged from the responses of Member States to the questionnaire.

A. Developing a shared vision for the sustainable development goals

77. Member States generally agreed that poverty eradication must remain the highest priority, completing the unfinished business of Goal 1, and that to realize this goal sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth in developing countries is a necessary requirement.

78. Beyond this, there was broad recognition of the need to ensure that all humanity has access to basic goods and services for a decent life, productive employment, health and education. Many stressed the need to address inequalities of different kinds in the post-2015 development agenda.

79. There was broad recognition of severe environmental stresses and their negative repercussions for human well-being, especially that of the poor and vulnerable. Many emphasized the need to promote sustainable management of the resource base and sustainable consumption and production.

80. In short, a shared vision emerges of achieving universal and equitable human development while respecting the Earth's ecological limits.

B. Priority areas

81. Most respondent countries enumerated their initial thinking on priority themes for sustainable development goals, as summarized in the figure in paragraph 16 of the present report.

82. The social development agenda of the Millennium Development Goals carries over strongly, while the protection of the natural resource base and economic

concerns feature much more prominently than in the Millennium Development Goals.

83. Some countries suggested clustering of related themes, which has a potential bearing on the formulation of goals. A number stressed the importance of addressing cross-cutting, or horizontal, issues like gender equality and equity in the formulation of all sustainable development goals.

C. Balancing the economic, the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development

84. Most countries indicated a preference, wherever feasible, for balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development within each goal, possibly through the selection of targets and indicators.

85. At the same time, it was appreciated that balancing the three dimensions will be a complex endeavour. While some called for building on Goal 7 ("environmental sustainability"), an opposing view was that expanding Goal 7 would not be sufficient to ensure that a future set of SDGs balances the three dimensions of sustainable development.

D. Key use of sustainable development goals at the country level

86. Many countries agreed that, given strong global commitment to the sustainable development goals, they would contribute to defining national policies and several said they could also influence national budget allocations. There was also broad support for the use of sustainable development goals as a tool for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development.

87. A number of countries, both developed and developing, see the sustainable development goals as guiding international development cooperation. A comparable number see sustainable development goals as useful tools for measuring progress towards sustainable development.

E. Defining national targets for global, universally applicable goals

88. Most respondents agreed that the international community needed shared principles, and many supported common global goals.

89. Most also agreed that the targets associated with the sustainable development goals should be common but differentiated or flexible to allow them to be tailored to national characteristics, priorities and level of development.

F. Incorporating existing goals and targets

90. It was stated that the sustainable development goals should build upon and be guided by the Millennium Declaration, Agenda 21, the Rio Principles and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. They should be consistent with other internationally agreed goals and targets, but the process of formulation of the

sustainable development goals should not be an occasion to renegotiate existing goals and targets.

91. At the same time, the sustainable development goals need to be more comprehensive, encompassing key aspects of sustainable development inadequately covered by existing goals.

G. Ensuring coherence with the post-2015 development agenda

92. Many countries highlighted the need to achieve a consensus that there will be a single development agenda with a single set of goals.

93. Many countries called for greater coordination between the different processes relating to the post-2015 development agenda and, in this regard, stressed the value of having the Open Working Group report prior to the special event in 2013.

94. There were mixed views on how and when to integrate the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals into the discussion on sustainable development goals, given that the 2013 special event is meant to take stock of progress on the Millennium Development Goals and identify remaining gaps.

H. Assessing progress

95. While there is a need for aggregate measures of progress towards sustainable development, the sustainable development goals should permit more detailed assessment of progress that captures inequalities at different levels and among different groups.

96. Capacities to collect and analyse such disaggregated data vary greatly and in many developing countries they will need to be strengthened.

97. Realistic measures of progress should take into account different starting points and baselines across countries.

98. As with the Millennium Development Goals, a framework for reporting and assessing progress, including for identifying gaps, will be important and, in this regard, some countries pointed to a role for the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

I. Engaging stakeholders

99. There is strong support for involving civil society, academia and other relevant stakeholders in the process of developing the sustainable development goals. At the global level, some countries suggested establishing a forum or mechanism for Major Groups to share ideas, collaborate with Member States and assure accountability.

100. They should also be consulted, making use of social media and latest information technologies. National and regional consultation processes need to be transparent and inclusive, reaching out to all actors including the poor and vulnerable groups.

101. The engagement of the private sector was underlined as critical, but the avenues for their engagement were not mapped out.

J. New global partnership for development

102. Several stressed the importance of considering means of implementation of the sustainable development goals.

103. Some Member States highlighted that achieving the sustainable development goals will be more complex than the Millennium Development Goals, involving partnership beyond development cooperation. Multiple actors that have heretofore operated in relative isolation will need to come together. One suggestion was for establishing multilateral partnerships around each sustainable development goal for voluntary collaboration and information sharing as one approach to advancing implementation.